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## TRANSLATION.

IF language could be correctly described as a receptacle of thought, translation would be an easy task, and, like any other mechanical art, could be brought to perfection. It would be necessary merely to connect two languages in the mind of a person who knew them both, when the thought, like liquid through a syphon, would flow from one into the other without the loss of a single drop. But this analogy, which by the way is seldom met with nowadays, does not correspond even remotely to fact. The connection between thought and language is not mechanical and external, but vital and essential. Thought and language represent various aspects of a common operation. It is true that it is in our power to attend, now to one aspect of this operation, now to another : otherwise we should not be able to differentiate grammar from logic ; but the possession of this faculty of discrimination does not imply in the smallest degree a differentiation in the operation itself. Language and thought are coextensive, inseparable, perhaps even identical. They have been so from their origin throughout the entire period of their growth.

The form of our thought and language is determined by environment ; it varies from country to country. Moreover, a generation does not construct its thought afresh for itself ; it inherits the major part of it through language from ancestors. Language is the savings bank of civilization, the varieties of which are so great that it may be safely affirmed that the concepts which embody them have never more than local import, that the chance of one word having the same meaning as another, or of any word retaining the same meaning for a considerable period of time, is infinitesimal. Even such an abstraction as "hope" is not absolutely the same as *l'espérance*. *L'espérance* has shades of suggestion reflective of the elasticity of the French temperament and the illusions of French history, while "hope" takes a more sober hue from the practical character of the nation which produced it, one of whose greatest modern representatives could even say : "Hope,

that liar." Certain words, such as "yesterday," and, in general, time and space relations regarded solely as such, contain no deposit of culture, no possibilities of variation; certain others, such as *cuisine*, *ennui*; "gentleman," "home," "sport," "steeple-chase," are so laden with residue of innumerable local experiences that usually no attempt is made to find for them what for convenience we call equivalents.<sup>1</sup> With the conjoining of concepts (and names) in such expressions as *le bon Dieu*, *bonne maman*, "dry goods" (Amer.), "note of hand;" or in sentences such as "*Ça saute aux yeux*," "*Un tiens vaut mieux que deux tu l'auras*," "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," "Three cheers for France!" the possibilities of divergence between languages are increased. And so on through the ascending scale, until we reach style, which is an intensely personal thing, especially when allied to verse. In verse the thought is wedded to a certain cadence, rhythm, meter, perhaps even rhyme. The metrical system used is actively determinant of the course of the thought. Thus Dante, whose resources were apparently limitless, confesses that in the interest of his rhymes "he had made words say what they were not wont to express for other poets." How much more is the thought dictated by the exigencies of versification to poets of lesser range! Heine considered the French metrical system "a strait-jacket invented by Procrustes." Racine's verse represents a perfectly specific, conventional form of art and theory of life. The identity of art and life is felt in every line. To translate him is to discard all his harmonies, especially that of his magnificent verse; to rob him of half his strength and meaning by robbing him of almost all his beauty. To translate him into verse is to impose on oneself a series of new conditions which entail a virtual abandonment of the original. What difficulties attend the path of the translator, and how necessary that he should understand the limitations prescribed for him by the

<sup>1</sup>Canadian French furnishes interesting material for a study of equivalents. It contains a number of words which have been borrowed from English simply because the proper French names for things have never been brought forcibly before the popular consciousness. On the other hand, the effort to conserve the interests of French has resulted in such linguistic monstrosities as *l'Orateur de la Chambre* (the Speaker), *La Puissance du Canada* (the Dominion of Canada).

nature of his task! There can be no question of conveying the thought of an author in its entirety through another medium. For, not only, as already hinted, is this so-called medium part of the thought of the writer, but there are no precise equivalents for any of its elements. Fortunately there are broad resemblances in the life of peoples as well as of individuals; we are related by a community of need and feeling, by a similarity of physical environment. Certain world-institutions have shaped us in a common mold. These similarities in life and *milieu*, just like the dissimilarities alluded to above, are reflected in language. It is the business of the translator to hunt out the former, and by a skilful use of them to minimize the dividing effect of the latter. In particular he should press into service all the resources of the recipient tongue. He is aided in his task by a certain beautiful power of language. Words in their natural environment, *i. e.*, in sentences, are not static, but dynamic. Each word is affected by all its neighbors, gives up to them, it may be, a part of its meaning, or is reinforced thereby. A word may respond sensitively to each episode in an entire story. Thus I found it necessary to postpone the translation of the title of *Das edle Blut* (Wildenbruch) and *L'Arrabbiata* (Heyse) until my class had finished the narratives themselves. The office of a translator is not unlike that of a painter in the possibilities of shading by contrast and harmony with environment. A translator having to render the union of two concepts does not need to look for the two concepts in the recipient language which are least unlike them. He may, and very often does, reproduce the effect by a grouping of words which taken individually have no relation to the original; *e. g.*, he may render *le nez au vent* by "his head held high," ignoring the objects so picturesquely linked in the French. I see, on casting my eye over the annotations of some texts which I have edited, that they contain hundreds of phrases which can be rendered only by a wide departure from the wording, *i. e.*, from the grouping of concepts—of the original. To translate them literally would provoke laughter, create an impression of grotesqueness, than which nothing could interfere more fatally with the rendering of a writer's ideas.

Certain conclusions result from the foregoing analysis, some of which are merely of academic interest, while others are of consequence to the work of the class-room.

The effect of a translation is not to be judged solely by comparison with the original. A translation—I am not speaking now of translation in the class-room, where, as we shall see, the main purpose is to get as quickly as possible into the heart of the foreign language—a translation is made for persons who have no knowledge of a language, or it has no *raison d'être*. It follows that a quaintness of phrasing and reminiscent literalness which to the scholar, whose eye reverts constantly to the original, seem pardonable enough, are to be rated as defects. Henry James appears to have lost feeling for the foreignness of certain literally rendered French phrases. It may be doubted whether Mr. Norton's unswerving fidelity to the imagery of the *Divine Comedy* is appropriate to those passages of which in his preface he admits that the form was dictated to Dante by the "musical bond." When the quaintness, however, is in the *subject* of the original, in the *civilization* it represents, and is not made to appear as if it were part of the writer's *presentment of himself to his readers*, the case is different. All works currently included under the name of literature, in particular all texts which figure in modern-language courses, are addressed to the special public which speaks the language in which they are written. The implication of a relation to a special public is part of their meaning and message. A translation from a foreign book should preserve a certain exotic flavor representing this irreducibility of one civilization into the terms of another. It should not be such "that the reader should if possible forget that it is a translation at all, and be lulled into the illusion that he is reading an original work—something original from an English hand."<sup>1</sup> For if it be true that writers do not, as a rule, impress their own special public as quaint, it is also true that to any man whose individuality has not been washed away by cosmopolitanism, a new civilization, and even an unknown feature of the same, presents itself as strange.

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by MATTHEW ARNOLD in his *On Translating Homer*.

A translation to be ideal must be executed as a whole. The translator must not "lose sight of the forest for the trees." It is not enough to find happy renderings of passages in isolation. Matthew Arnold in his essay *On Translating Homer* declares the aim of the translator to be the production of a "general effect." Mr. Charles E. Norton in the preface to his translation of the *Divine Comedy* says it is to give the "intellectual and emotional substance with as close a correspondence as possible to the tone and style of the original."

Translating should be preceded by a study, both conscious and subconscious, of an author's style. As for the power of subconscious study, nature alone decides whether a translator is to have it in generous or limited measure. Little can be done for him, if he lacks the instinct of language, by laying down rules; little gained by him from a study of the great models.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, he will find it helpful to formulate the characteristics of a particular style. Thus Victor Hugo's dialogue in *Ruy Blas* will be seen to be alert and elastic, his phrasing brief and nervous, his instinct for local color intense, at times exaggerated, *e. g.*, in his use of Arabic-Spanish terms: *alguazil*, *argousin*, *algarade*, *alcade*, etc.; his action rapid, his imagery brilliant, his principal character monstrously stagey, his sentiment commonplace, his rhetoric in the monologues a thundering Niagara.<sup>2</sup> Or, to take another example, George Sand's habitual style, the style of *Indiana* and *Valentine*, is, to use Henry James's happy phrase, "noble and imperturbable," has a "grand felicity of expression." Her prose, written without effort and without having passed through tentative, initiatory stages, is eloquent, ardent, ample, beautiful. She said: "There is nothing in me; *another* sings within me as it lists." In the *Mare au Diable*, which is more frequently read in class than any other of her novels, what is particularly known by the name of her "style" is represented in the two opening chapters only. The story proper is couched in an idealized transcript of the peasant talk

<sup>1</sup> My excuse for not including in this paper a study of the great translations is that it would lead me beyond the limits of a review article.

<sup>2</sup> See FAGUET, *Dix-neuvième siècle*, *Victor Hugo*, p. 204.

in Berry. It is not the words and accents of the peasant that are reproduced, as in our "kail-yard" novels, but earthy savor of speech, blended pedantry and simplicity; in short, atmosphere. As a rule, the personal characteristics of an author's style surpass in importance the distinctive notes which he lends to his individual characters. Nevertheless, account must be taken by the translator of the expression given to varieties of character and situation. "Little fish must not talk like whales," unless the author has erred by making them do so. A translation should keep on the same social level as the original; it should reflect colloquialisms, quaintness, servility, kingliness, etc.; archaisms should be rendered by archaisms, proverbs by proverbs. It is advisable, as a rule, to neglect puns. A philosophical justification of this attitude might be found in the fact that puns do not further the main purpose of language—communication of ideas; a poetic in Victor Hugo's words: "*Le calembour est la fiente de l'esprit.*"

The pursuit of an ideal form in class at all times would probably retard progress. Pupils in moderns must cover a certain amount of ground. I recommend that from time to time certain chosen passages be prescribed to be translated at home in writing in conformity with as many as possible of the ideal requirements. The more careful formulation of ideal translation is synonymous with greater exactness of comprehension. More important still, translation is an excellent exercise in the teaching of English. For younger pupils translation would seem to possess advantages over independent composition. It involves a greater amount of search and balancing, a cultivation of the ear and judgment. Oxford men, who are distinguished by their nice use of English, are trained by translation of the Greek and Latin classics. If modern languages are to fill worthily the place from which they have pushed the ancient, they cannot afford to neglect this side of their work. Lowell says:

In reading such books as chiefly deserve to be read in any foreign language, it is wise to translate consciously and in words as we read. There is no such help to a fuller mastery of our vernacular. It compels us to such a choosing and testing, to so nice a discrimination of sound, propriety, position, and shade of meaning, that we now first learn the secret of the words we have

been using or misusing all our lives, and are gradually made aware that to set forth even the plainest matter as it should be set forth is not only a very difficult thing, calling for thought and practice, but an affair of conscience as well. Translation teaches us as nothing else can, not only that there is a best way, but that it is the only way.

The dictionary is the student's *vade mecum*. The ideal dictionary would be one in which words were treated as dynamic, *i. e.*, always placed in their environment. The dimensions of such a book would render it, of course, impracticable. *By attending to the static aspect of a word*, however, we are enabled to give definitions which include the main part of its connotation, or equivalents which are proximate in meaning. A detached meaning of this kind may be an entity by convention only, indeed may be merely a rude approximation; it is nevertheless indispensable in practice. One frequently hears the assertion made that it is a good exercise for a student to choose among these approximations the one which comes nearest to suiting his purpose. I fail to see that this operation contains any mental discipline whatever. The belief that it does so is based on the false assumption that when a choice is made among meanings the translation is complete, that among the general meanings one is correct. There is mental discipline in applying one of these meanings to the passage to be translated, *in adjusting it insensibly to its environment and searching for equivalents to render, not the isolated word, but the thought*. It follows that the ordinary dictionary, with its bewildering multiplicity, is less serviceable than a well-made special vocabulary containing little not actually required for the translation of the text. It follows also that it is a pernicious illusion to suppose that "anybody" can make a vocabulary. I do not hesitate to say that no part of a scholar's work calls for more judgment, scholarship, and instinct for language. For none is it more imperative that good bilingual men should be secured. I venture to add a few practical hints from my own experience gained in making vocabularies for two texts. When a fairly common meaning exists, which shows the connection of a word with its root or its elements, it should be given, even although not exemplified in the text. It should be put first, and be clearly marked off from the others. A knowl-



edge of the derivation of a word rounds out a student's lexicological information, and lightens the work of memory. The most usual meaning (or meanings) should come next—in the absence of an etymological meaning it would come first—; it should likewise be given, even when not exemplified in the text, and should be marked off clearly from the others. Students should learn it by heart. Meanings should be classified by types. No unnecessary meaning should be given. The meaning selected by a student for a special passage in the text should be used to bring the word looked up into touch with its environment. The transformed—*i. e.*, the real—meaning should be recognized and impressed upon the mind; I do not say that it should be necessarily learned by heart. Idioms should be translated as wholes. Except when they contain no word which an average student would need to look up—in which case they might for reasons of expediency appear among the annotations—they should be placed in the vocabulary, and listed under the word most likely to be unknown to students. If we consulted the interests of the best students only, it might be advisable to add nothing more. For those who lack the power to perform the dynamic readjustment of meaning to environment, it seems to me necessary to add meanings which, by simple incorporation in the English sentence most likely to result from an ordinary person's efforts, will make good English. In cases where the required meanings are such as not to suggest themselves at all to a person who, knowing the two languages perfectly, is unaware of the environment of the words in question, it would be almost necessary to supply environment. The limit to such treatment can naturally not be prescribed. The more environment, the better.

I find it wonderfully stimulating to students to appeal to them for a *better word* than the one which may have occurred to myself. I find it an excellent exercise to explain to them in what points the words they suggest are inadequate. When they are translating a prose writer, I do not find it necessary to tolerate any of the grotesque stuff which passes current under the name of literal translation. It is surprising with what quickness a student can be brought to see that such translation is false.

I have found it a good plan also, when obliged to cover a large amount of ground, to read the text aloud with exaggerated antithesis and much show of Frenchiness, throwing in, as I advance rapidly, the translation of a word or phrase which from my knowledge of students I consider likely to be misunderstood.

As the main purpose of translation is to get into the heart of the original, it seems to follow as a matter of course that as soon as a passage is understood or translated, it should be read aloud. And when I say read, I do not mean articulated, or spoken as if it were a meaningless arrangement of words which by much twisting and turning could be made over into something fairly sensible, but as if it were a piece of literature appealing at first hand to a reader's sensibilities. When the text is good—and what right have we to offer any other kind to our students—I insist on their enjoying it.

It may be said: Would it not be better to discard translation in the class-room altogether, seeing that even ideal translation is so imperfect, and that most frequently one must be content with a makeshift counterpart of the same? I do not hold a brief for translation as opposed to the various "natural" methods. The merits of the rival systems are discussed in the Report of the Committee of Twelve. I believe that translation even when unideal can be very profitable. It is found to be indispensable in the vast majority of schools. I have stated briefly how the practice may be pursued with least handicap and most profit. I write for "translationists."

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